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ABSTRACT

This study is part of a regional study in industrial South Wales on the determinants of participation and non-participation in post-compulsory education and training, with special reference to processes of change in the patterns of these determinants over time and to variations between geographical areas. The study combines contextual analysis of secondary data about education and training providers with a regional study of several generations of families in South Wales (a door-to-door survey of 1,104 representative householders), semi-structured interviews, and taped oral histories conducted in 1996-97. This study begins by questioning the narrow definition of learning used in much present writing concerning lifelong learning, which tends to focus on the purported economic and societal benefits of prolonging and widening participation in formal education and training programs. In contrast, much valuable learning already goes on, and has always gone on, outside formal programs of instruction, both at work and at leisure. The study concludes that if such informal learning continues to be ignored by proponents of a learning society, as it has been by the authors of the recent green papers, for example, then the result will be an unnecessary exclusiveness in definitions of a learning society and an unjustifiable reliance on certification. (Contains 24 references.) (KC)

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PATTERNS OF PARTICIPATION IN ADULT EDUCATION AND TRAINING

A Cardiff and Bristol University ESRC-funded Learning Society Project

WORKING PAPER 13

Home and away: the decline of informal learning in South Wales 1900-1997

Stephen Gorard, Ralph Fevre, Gareth Rees, John Furlong, and Emma Renold

1998

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LIST OF CONTENTS **PAGE NUMBER**

Abstract	1
Introduction	2
The project	4
The evidence of the survey	5
Leisure learning	5
Work-based learning	8
Informal leisure learning	10
Credentialism	15
Informal learning at work	16
Learning is 'common sense'	17
Conclusion	22
References	25
Appendix - Training and insecure employment	27

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Abstract

This paper begins by questioning the narrow definition of learning used in much present writing concerning lifelong learning which tends to focus on the purported economic and societal benefits of prolonging and widening participation in formal education and training programmes. In contrast, much valuable and non-trivial learning already goes on, and has always gone on,

outside formal programmes of instruction. This is true both at work and at leisure. Using evidence from a study of patterns of participation in adult learning in South Wales from 1900, the paper argues that if such informal learning continues to be ignored by proponents of a learning society, as it has been by the authors of the recent green papers for example, then the result will be an unnecessary exclusiveness in definitions of a learning society, and an unjustifiable reliance on certification.

Introduction

There has been little research into learning which does not take the form of institutionalised, accredited participation in formal education or training. The sociology of education tradition usually emphasises an individual's formal rather than 'real' level of education (Girod 1990), and there are sound methodological and philosophical reasons for this. Informal learning does not lead to such convenient measures as participation and pass rates for example, and once its existence has been acknowledged it is harder to find an operational definition of learning on the continuum leading to the trivial and the commonplace (Coffield 1996). 'In its liberal form, education is about establishing a boundary.... between itself as a "serious" activity and other less serious or non-serious activities such as leisure' (Edwards and Usher 1998, p. 86). With learning replacing education, the boundaries around education as a field of study are breached since almost any activity can be seen to involve learning. Nevertheless, by effectively ignoring informal learning writers may become confused over trends in skill formation over time (in Gallie 1988), and there is little evidence that indicators such as participation and qualification are good predictors of a person's value for employers or to society (Eraut 1997). There is therefore a danger of discourse concerning the Learning Society being dominated by the providers, and becoming the empire of the 'schoolers' (Gorard et al. 1997a).

Eraut (1997) has further argued that if learning is defined as a 'change in persons capability or understanding', then it can encompass informal 'background' learning at work without also including all changes in behaviour. One of the purposes of this paper is to examine the possibility of extending this use of the term learning to activities outside work. This paper uses a fairly broad definition

of informal learning, such that it includes learning taking place as a process outside formal participation (and thus not usually encompassed by the trajectories discussed by this study so far, Gorard et al. 1998a, Gorard et al. 1998b). Informal learning includes non-certified episodes, and those leading to tacit knowledge. More crucially it encompasses learning both at work and at leisure. In this sense, talking to maintenance personnel at work about the operation of the photo-copier, or reading a weekly magazine at home about growing fruit in your garden, would be examples of informal learning. On the other hand, attending a lecture on health and safety, or learning to dance at an adult evening class would both be formal episodes. A great deal of learning goes on in work which is virtually unnoticed by researchers and even by employers but which is vitally necessary to the organisations people work for (and perhaps also to the fulfilment of the individuals concerned) even though it is not acquired in any formal manner. In some cases the acquisition of this learning is an active process, and it does not do justice to this sort of learning to describe it as 'sitting next to Nellie'. Informal learning can be described as being acquired by proactive individuals who seek out potential Nellies, and adopt a variety of other methods in order to do their jobs. Sometimes they transform those jobs in the process. The most active informal learners may be in a process of constant transformation, both of themselves and of what they do. It is almost as if the best sort of learning - and not simply that very basic learning without which the organisation could not function - is often this informal type.

In many important respects some of the evidence emerging from this study of patterns of participation over time would support and even amplify this view of informal learning. Much may be gained (for example in terms of delineating lifelong learning and the learning society) from looking at those individuals who actively set about picking up all sorts of knowledge and competencies. If informal learning is accepted as a useful and valid process in pursuit of a learning society, such a society can become more inclusive at a stroke since informal learners may not be participants in formal structures. On the other hand, if informal learning is ignored, as it often appears to be, then the 'learning age' may be in danger of becoming a sterile pursuit of National Training Targets or their revamped successors.

With this background in mind, the paper considers the following questions in relation to the various sources of data collected by this study:

i. What is the prevalence of informal learning in the various phases of the study?

ii. What evidence is available on the nature of informal learning?

iii. How is informal learning at work related to learning outside work?

It does not seek a definitive answer to any of these questions, but is a preliminary step in the investigation and analysis of these difficult issues.

The project

Since space is limited there will be little attempt to reproduce in this paper the full background to this substantial project, or the complete methods of data collection and analysis used. Readers are referred to Rees *et al.* (1997) and Fevre *et al.* (1997) for a discussion of the theoretical basis of the study, to Gorard (1997) and Gorard *et al.* (1997_b) for a presentation of the methods used. In summary, industrial South Wales is used as the focus of the study, since it has experienced an economic 'boom, bust and retrenchment' over a relatively short period - the lifetime of one of the participants. This makes it easier to uncover the links between economic activity and participation in learning. The study was regionally focused to allow the researchers to gain clear descriptions of the changing structures of objective opportunities for participation over 100 years, and this has been achieved primarily by analysis of taped oral histories of families dating back to 1890 in the South Wales Coalfield Archive, by interviews with key participants with long experience in local training, by secondary data analysis, and through the experiences of the researchers in previous locally-based studies. Within the focus area, a systematic stratified sample of 1,104 education and training histories have been collected from respondents aged 15 to 65, identified from the electoral register. The second wave interviewed many of the children of those in the first wave, while the third wave collected unstructured narratives via in-depth re-interview of 10% of those in the first two waves. These are the forms

of evidence used to consider the changing prevalence of informal learning in South Wales.

The evidence of the survey

Leisure learning

The systematic sample of 1,104 adults aged 16-65 were asked in the first two waves of the survey about all of their participation in learning 'episodes'. The attempt was made by interviewers to make the resulting list as full as possible by asking specifically about leisure learning, hobbies, and uncertified courses as well as training at work, full-time education, participation in government schemes and so on. In summary, 31% of the respondents reported no formal learning of any kind and these are the 'non-participants', yet it is shown by analysis of the interview data that in many cases they have undergone transformations in their lives that would involve significant learning. This group, by their own definition, are informal learners. Of course, this phenomenon is also encountered in the narratives of other respondents who have participated in formal episodes since the end of compulsory schooling. In fact, the evidence available suggests that informal learning is even more common among some groups of participants than among the non-participants (see Table I).

Table I - Reports of informal leisure study, by trajectory

Trajectory	Percentage
Lifetime	27
Immature	26
Delayed	25
Transitional	13
Non-participants	11

The only questions in the survey that directly address experiences of informal learning are to do with self-study or practice relating to a leisure interest. Table I shows a clear relationship between the answers to these questions and individual's more formal experiences. Two points can be made about these figures. Firstly, the percentage of those still in continuous formal education or training who

report such an interest (the 'immature' trajectories) is the same as for lifetime and delayed learners. Therefore the differences between other trajectories cannot be related to age. The average age at which a new interest is reported is 29. Both groups who have experienced learning later in life (lifetime and delayed) are more likely to undertake informal leisure learning episodes, suggesting that learning could be a habit and that the boundaries between formal and informal may be unclear for such respondents. The relationship is so strong that a leisure interest is a very useful predictor of later formal participation in the two component model suggested by this study (Gorard et al. 1998b). In addition, the results reinforce doubts about the efficacy of simply considering opportunities and barriers in attempting to encourage greater participation for other adults. The opportunities for informal learning are already so widespread, and the barriers so few, that there must be further reasons for non-participation. The finding that those who stay in formal education or training after compulsory schooling (the 'transitional' learners) and those who do not (the 'non-participants') are equally unlikely to have undertake leisure study suggests that simply extending the length of initial education, the unremitting policy of successive governments in the UK, will also not be sufficient to create a 'learning age'.

Nevertheless, it must be remembered that 38 of the 342 non-participants in the survey did report episodes of informal learning, and that these episodes neglected informal learning at work (see below). Informal learning is therefore prevalent, even among those who report no formal education or training as adults. The type of interests reported in the survey show evidence of change over time. An interest in local politics or history which accounted for 8% of the episodes in until the 1960s now accounts for 0% of the total (rounded figure). This interest has effectively disappeared in industrial South Wales. Similar declines are suggested in gardening (from 18% to 0) and art and photography (from 15% to 0). Of course, since the dates given relate to the decade in which the interest started, the decline is chiefly in those reporting a new informal interest. Many of those interested in gardening in the 1950s may be still gardening for example. However, it is clear that participation in sports (loosely defined), keeping pets, and using a computer have all increased from a combined total of 20% of the early episodes to 60% in the 1990s. Voluntary work, and haberdashery (and related interests) have remained constant at around 7% and 11% respectively.

Overall, and along with the move from history and art to sport and computers, the frequency of leisure interests has declined since 1945.

Around 50% of all respondents took a qualification at the age of 16+, and this figure clearly increases over the time of the study, but 55% of those who reported informal study did so, confirming that the findings are not age or period related. However, those with informal interests (hereafter 'hobbyists') had exactly the same frequency of continuing to full time continuous education (FTCE) after the age of 16 as all others. It may be that as FTCE is extended while hobbies decline, although hobbyists are more likely to continue with FE in any period the two trends cancel out. Statistically formal education is replacing hobbies. This interpretation is backed up by other available indications. Of those who continue to further education, hobbyists are less likely to take a qualification at the end of the first post-compulsory episode. They get fewer substantive training episodes in their first two jobs, and even allowing for this they are less likely to take a qualification when training for their first two jobs. They are much more likely to take a non-continuous, not work-related education or training episode (e.g. to attend an extra-mural or adult evening class), but less likely to take a qualification as a result. It may be that less formal episodes are more attractive to these respondents, who may therefore be discouraged to participate by the trend towards certified courses and the auditing of performance. Such an interpretation is possible from analysis of the interview data.

If a sustained leisure interest requiring study or practice is such a clear indicator of participation in later learning (increasing the odds in a logistic regression model by 30%) it would be foolish to ignore the implications for the creation of a wider learning society. The decline in the evidence for such interests is a further indication of the non-linear development of patterns of lifelong learning in the UK (Rees et al. 1997). A genuinely liberal education has been claimed to lead to open-minded reflection and enquiry, and an unprejudiced search for truth (Armour and Fuhrmann 1993), but despite evidence that thinking skills and critical awareness can be taught, more rigid curricula means less time for critical thinking, as one struggles to learn the thoughts of others via the transmission model of education (Wales et al. 1993), while in the past, and in less formal settings, the process of learning may have been easier in some respects.

Work-based learning

The work histories of the 1104 respondents yielded a total of 3,787 work episodes (spells of work on the same job with the same employer). In over 60% of these episodes, the employee reported no training at all. In many cases, these employees moved from apparently unrelated jobs, such as from coal-mining to shop management, with no 'training'. It appears therefore that a considerable amount of learning may go on in the work-place which is not reported as training. There was no direct question on this in the survey, and the episodes of formal training reported are, by their nature, silent on this issue but they are worth rehearsing here for the light they throw on the nature of changes over time.

Most significantly the incidence of formal work-related training has not increased since 1945, remaining at 39 per cent of all work episodes which involved some sort of training (this lack of change is also evident when the length of employment is taken into account by dividing the number of formal training episodes by the number of months employed). The only growth in the types of training identified in the survey was in health and safety training, which has grown consistently from an occurrence in 15% of jobs in the 1940s to 28% in the 1990s. Some other types of training, such as short in-service courses (23%) and induction/initial training (18%), have remained completely constant over time. What has apparently decreased over time is the frequency of training reported by the learner as enhancing 'employability', that might be considered useful by another employer. This type of training was never common, but has now declined from 9% to 7% of the episodes.

Work-related training is skewed towards jobs undertaken earlier in life, and it occurs more often in lengthy spells of employment and this is especially true of both more prolonged training and transferable training. On average, people do not receive training that enhances their employability after the age of 22. In general, the training that is reported more recently is shorter than training in the past (and it is interesting to reflect that if this signifies a problem of recall of shorter episodes in the past, it would mean that all forms of job-related training have actually declined since 1945). There has been a relative decline in the frequency of any type of training episode lasting five or more days from 18% in

the 1950s to 11% in the 1980s. This agrees with the report of the DfEE (1995) which shows how the frequency of job-related training has increased from 1980 to 1994 for example, but this growth has been mainly in courses off-the-job on employers premises lasting less than a week (Gorard et al. 1997a). It is also interesting that despite an overall increase in attempted certification after training, the increase has only happened in relation to short episodes lasting less than five days. In the longer episodes, there is no increase in attempted certification. When this is examined as a proportion of all work episodes it is clear that certification has declined along with substantive training. As the 'raw' frequency of training episodes increases, their relative length and chances of certification decreases (Table II).

Table II - Percentage attempting qualification after training

Decade	40s	50s	60s	70s	80s	90s
Attempt qualific	10	9	9	8	6	5

The vast majority of these longer training spells are 'paid for' by the employer, but there is some indication that this proportion is in decline, and is being replaced by government training schemes (Table III). In the 1940s 94% of episodes were employer-funded (or the employee could not recall). The peak was in the 1970s with 96% of the episodes being employer-funded, and the lowest was in the 1990s with 88%.

Table III - Percentage participating in government scheme

Decade	40s	50s	60s	70s	80s	90s
Govt. scheme	0	5	3	2	5	11

To sum up the survey results on formal training in work: health and safety training is increasing and this short employer-based course is typical of the growth in training over time. New training is often brief, prescribed by law, non-transferrable, and non-certified (at least according to our respondents interpretation of this term). The financial burden has shifted from employers towards government agencies. It has also shifted to the taxpayer via schools and colleges, since when the analysis is expanded to consider learning outside the workplace it is clear that non-participation has declined overall, meaning that the

chief change over time has been in extended initial education. The relative lack of substantive training in work episodes suggests that informal learning has a key role for individuals adapting to new work situations, and that this is becoming more important but probably less highly-regarded, over time (see also Appendix on training in insecure employment). Again, such an interpretation is certainly possible of many of the stories from the other phases of the project.

Informal leisure learning

In the further interviews with respondents from the first two waves of the study, interviewers were concerned to find out about learning episodes that had perhaps not been covered in the survey stage. There were many interviewees who reported no informal learning experiences, and no leisure interests involving study or practice. In most cases, where a reason was given, this was ascribed to lack of interest, by someone who had not attended school regularly and left at the earliest opportunity for example, or to lack of time, by someone like a consultant surgeon who had spent most of his life in formal study. In very general terms, where an interviewee described any genuine interest at length, they also described others, whether of a formal or informal nature. In a sense, as suggested by the survey findings, there are people who seek out things to learn, and people who do not. Surprisingly, books and magazines were more frequently cited as sources of information than other people, or broadcasts or information technology. In specific examples, magazines were used to learn sports like golf, the use of software such as spreadsheets, and how to build a radio transmitter. The use of books included learning musical instruments like guitar, languages, calculus, and practical skills like building a garage or wiring a house. It is important to recall in reading the accounts below that the majority of people contacted via the systematic sampling procedure have little or no formal education after compulsory schooling.

A professional training manager from the Sandfields area (one of the key informants, see Chambers et al. 1998) tells the story of discovering that a 30 year old worker scored very highly on an aptitude test. Initially no one believed that the score was valid, since the man worked on a low-skill job checking cans. He had no qualifications and no ambition to progress. However, the score was

verified, and the worker was interviewed. He reported only attending school occasionally and not bothering to take any qualifications since he did not feel that he needed any to work in Port Talbot. He turned down all offers of company-provided development and training. The manager concluded:

> I don't know what it is with Port Talbot people, they don't appear to have any ambition. Perhaps they don't fancy the school environment again.

The man in question reads widely at home, and decided for himself when to attend school if the topic of study interested him. Thus, although not a primary respondent this man can be used to represent one type of informal learner, who is disaffected from the process of education but remains a 'learner'. This type of story is not common in the interviews. Generally the informal learners are eclectic in their subjects, hungry for new experiences. If their level of formal participation is low it is probably not because they have refused opportunities offered to them.

One man (B324), for whom there was little separation between work and home, had taught himself pottery (with his wife), electrolysis for metallising, simple electronics, wax casting, and furniture modelling. He has a perspex-cutting room in his house, a gold-plated frog in his living room, and once made a scale model of the Challenger space shuttle which is now on the desk of a four star general in NASA. In some cases he has been successfully employed on the basis of self-taught skills.

> So as I say.... I haven't got a GCE or a BSc or whatever they're called these days.... but as I say you don't have to be academic to be able to do things.... Because of the books I read and I like reading science books et cetera, and with the television my favourite channel is the discovery channel.

> It's the same with the French polishing you see. I used to do it as a favour. I got a book from the library. I had a blind chappie who was a pianist like and he used to tune pianos and doing them up. He asked me if I knew anything about polishing and I said 'not the foggiest'. So I went to the

library, got a book on it, we got the French polish and promptly went into business. It was just a sideline when I was working for the printers.

This story of a genuinely multi-skilled but mainly self-taught interviewee is very similar to that in Gorard et al. (1997c), where a self-taught plasterer and electrician (G621), who loved opera, but worked as a steel foundryman, explained how he had read about the care of the 7,000 bedding plants he had in his garden.

> Well, you see when I was doing those I used to send off for those books. Once a month you get books from them. They come in volumes. There are 12 volumes. So if ever I was stuck I look, I used to look through the books and say 'oh'. Read it up oh that's the way to do it. It's the same with the bricklaying. I ordered a bricklaying book and I read it up.... with plastering now a friend of mine is in the library and she got me a book, so ... if I got to do a job I'm not quite sure I get the book and read it up and say 'oh well' this is the way.
>
> Like that wall was all different when I'd done it the first time. Then we went to Porthcawl one day and we see these walls and she [his wife] said 'yeah it's nice - could you do that on the wall'? She said 'well there's a ;lot of cracks there' So we took the old wall off and I plastered it across, removed all the fittings, fitted them all in and plastered it all off and it's been there since. She likes it but then I had to do the room in there then.... Just put a couple of mouldings on the wall.
>
> I like doing things. I think if you like doing something it's no hardship then. You know, time flies.

Another man (B349) says:

> I like to build these little things. I've got something going on here look. This is a low-powered. That's not part of it but this is a low-powered transmitter/receiver. That's the sort of thing I like doing, but that's part of a project I got out of a magazine.

Although the differences can be overemphasised, there is a pattern in these stories in the types of skills and activities undertaken by men and by women. To some extent the gendered differences in the distribution of learning trajectories (see Gorard et al. 1998c) may be replicated by gendered differences in informal learning outside work.

A woman in her forties (N110) reported taking a course in German which was uncertificated, which was how she preferred it since she was studying primarily for interest and 'tourism' and had 'never taken to languages at school'. This takes three hours of one evening in the week. She also sews and reads a lot at home. In addition:

> I'm very involved in my local church with the Mothers' Union and Young Wives' Group and... I'm at the moment treasurer of the Mother's Union... I've been treasurer twice of the Wives' Group and secretary. I've also been secretary of the Fete committee , and as I say I was secretary of the PTA... I'm on the social committee to do with the church, so that takes up a lot of my time.

Another woman of a similar age (G768) has taught herself to crochet and do quilting from books, building on skills in knitting and sewing she gained as a child. She organises a local 'ladies club' and a coffee club to raise funds for her children's school. Again there are similarities with her earlier work as a bookkeeper which she undertook with no reported training, and where she taught herself how national insurance worked from pamphlets for example. But she speaks for several respondents when she points out the pressures on her time.

> Yes, I think when you've got a family you tend not to... Can't seem to get around to do all the things I would like to do.

A similar story emerges from a woman in her fifties (N094) who started explaining how she taught herself to play the organ:

> When we came here... there were two organists and neither could play at this funeral for some reason. He said you've got to play. Fortunately there was a week in between and every day I went down, this was a very old pipe

> organ. I went home in tears and said 'I cant play it', it's a completely different ball game to playing the piano. You wouldn't believe it... Middle C isn't middle C and when you take your finger off it stops. I just can't, but I did it.

She runs a sewing class for the Mothers' Union, does all the brassing for the local church, and the laundry of their linen. She is Brown Owl of the local brownie pack, and governor of her local infant school. She reports no special training to take on any of these roles, which she describes as 'just inheriting'.

One woman who runs groups of brownies, rainbows and guides (G613) describes the skills she has developed as a result:

> Patience. Patience and the understanding of children. How their minds start to work, to be honest, because I know you've got children of your own but none of these children are the same.... And managing groups of kiddies is a difficult skill isn't it?

Yet another (B360) took over the aerobics class she was attending, and is now employed as a tutor in Ogwr. The pay was so good that she gave up her job as a cashier to travel the borough providing classes. Again, no special training and no qualifications are mentioned. In fact they are explicitly denied. At the age of 53, she has gained an A grade in GCSE French, and is studying for A level, aiming for a higher qualification:

> Then my dream is, Brian and I, we're going to - when the boys don't need us any more - we're going to get a job on a camp site in France. He's going to leave Fords. He's going to be the handyman and the person that does the garden, and I'm going to be the receptionist and I'm going to talk French to everybody.

In some cases, people's ambitions are more prosaic. One woman (B305) who was illiterate when she left school and throughout her first marriage, simply wanted to learn to read:

> Mine started to get better really when I was having my first son. I was in hospital for nigh on six months and I mean hospital is quite boring. I started to read. I read a lot now but I find I like to go over the books a couple of times because I'm always picking up things that I've missed before.

A woman in a similar position was taught to read by her husband, and can now read a tabloid newspaper, a skill which she was keen to demonstrate, while a woman in her sixties (G571) described how she had always been a 'reader', and she reads all day, every day (anything except a 'cowboy' book). She has no formal post-compulsory education or training, and needless to say no qualifications.

Credentialism

The recent drive towards qualifying people for participating in courses was bemoaned by several respondents, but the most consistent stance on this theme emerged from consideration of the stories of the local trainers themselves. The manager of a local adult education project in Bridgend pointed out:

> A lot of courses in the past were leisure-based with people attending for the social element. A typical profile of a learner was unqualified but interested in learning for learning's sake. Definitely not looking for qualifications out of it.

A community education manager in Blaenau Gwent made a similar comment:

> The turning point for community education in Blaenau Gwent was the passing of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992. This saw the end of the old ethos. We know that many of our students come to us not wanting accreditation, they have a different agenda... who regard this sort of provision as a lifeline... for learning which is enjoyable in itself.

In some respects these findings reinforce the warnings made by NIACE (1994) that participation and certification is itself a barrier for some people, who might

want a more relaxed return to formal learning. However, both managers above would agree that the new funding arrangements have produced some improvements:

> Now people come to us and say what do I get at the end of it? Where do I go after it?' This has changed the type of learner. They are more achievement orientated than learning, but there is also a greater age, gender and class spread. It's not just pensioners and the middle-class. Also the move to accredited courses allows a greater range of funding. Now courses are better funded and equipped.

Informal learning at work

In the early part of this century, informal learning can be seen as a part of the collective experience encountered as a direct result of a new wave of industrialisation; that is coalmining. In retrospect it is somewhat alarming to discover that the growth industry in South Wales during the early decades depended utterly upon a system of informal learning by which the skills and knowledge of coalmining were transferred from one group of experienced coalminers to a new group of 'want-to-be' coalminers attracted to the industry from poorly paid rural employment. In addition, this process of informal learning also applied to coalminers' families where the early socialisation of male children prepared them in a general sense for their future coalmining experience. This informal familial process of education was reinforced as son went to work with father and brother worked with brother. This system of mentoring was a in a very real sense a matter of physical well-being and even survival. What is described by respondents as 'pit sense' can also be taken to mean the lessening of potential for serious injury. However, the educational opportunities that existed went further than coal-winning skills, for they also embraced a socio-economic analysis of society and capitalism as its economic mode of production. Progression to more formal means of learning were not simply accidental spin-offs from these informal intellectual discussions. It is clear from the historical evidence that the mining system of mentorship also included a desire on the part of the older generation to enthuse their younger counterparts towards educational attainment. It should be noted that the archival

evidence on informal learning is primarily concerned with the coalfield, and therefore with men rather than women (for a fuller report of the findings from the Coalfield Archive see forthcoming Working Paper 14).

Learning is 'common sense'

It should be recalled from the survey findings that most new jobs involved no training of any sort, not even half a day of health and safety. Perhaps the most common response to questions in interview about training for new tasks was that new tasks were picked up through 'common sense'. This response came from individuals in a wide variety of situations, from barristers in pupillage, to pharmacists on drug counters, to lathe operators, school teachers, sales representatives and care assistants, for example. One woman became a clerk, then an assistant to a dog-breeder, and then a small-holding farmer without any formal training at any stage. Another was trusted with the accounts of medium-sized firm, and later set up her own play group for children, both without any training at all. Another respondent was a cook in the army, using only her knowledge from cooking at home for the family. The point they are making is that, in their view, formal training was unnecessary and that experience was everything, although a few complained of being 'thrown in at the deep end' and not having 'a clue what I was doing'. It should also be noted that many respondents did describe more formal induction, and although it is difficult to judge there are some indications that the survey may have under-estimated the amount of such training.

One, a woman in her 50s (B9983), who left school at 15 with her parent's blessing and had no lifetime qualifications, had this to say of her jobs in haberdashery:

> Once you learnt how to do things, it was more or less all the same.... What you done, you done your training for a month of how to sew and this that and the other and used heavy machines that was it. You didn't get no more training again....I mean the thing is I can go right through from a complete suite from the arms, backs, outside backs, cushions, front borders, seats, so I mean you know through the years I mean you know you pick it up.

A man in his 60s (G563) left school at 14 chiefly for economic reasons, like so many others. He also had no lifetime qualifications, but had a very successful career in British Steel Tinplate, being promoted several times and moving between areas of work, having received no formal training in his account.

> You learn as you get along.... You got to train yourself and you use your hands and ears. No one came along and said, you mustn't do this or you mustn't do that.... I mean common sense will tell you not to do certain things.... I can pick up most things purely by watching someone else doing it.... I did my own wiring in my house [a smart house on the edge of the Brecon Beacons].

Another man (G626) was a coal-cutter who had to give up when his local mine suffered a catastrophe.

> There was an explosion in Six Bells - can you remember it? And there was quite a few dead. Well, we was actually working, they were working towards us from Six Bells.... and we was only a matter of from here to that wall away from then when it happened. So I thought that was enough so then, um, I came out and went to be a manager with Premier Cheques. Used to have a cheque and they could go into the shop and buy clothes. Premier Cheques it was called at that time and I was manager in Tredegar, and they moved me over to Brynmawr.

The importance of this story is that he received no training at all in order to switch from being coalminer to catalogue shop manager (apparently successfully). He states that he could have had five or six jobs, and from an era of full employment there are many such examples of what would now seem extraordinary career changes involving no retraining.

Similarly a signalman on the railways in the 1950s became a station master with a staff of six 'doing everything, income tax, bills, pay, everything'. He learnt his tasks 'just by spending a fortnight with the chap who was doing it before me... and I'd issue all tickets'. It made it difficult for him to deal with the unexpected:

> Somebody once, I wonder if it was a put up job, bought me a bike to send to Ireland and I ended up sending it to Dudley the next station down the line because I couldn't deal with it.

An assistant in a pharmacy today (G9006) found the job very difficult to start with:

> It was about three or four months before I could really get into and know... and knew what I was doing, but as I say I'm giving out drugs now that you don't know really what they're for and they're given different brand names. And you're not really given the generic name of the drug so there's no.... unless you ask which.... we're a very, very busy pharmacy anyway and there's not really a lot of time for training.

Another woman with several job changes has had no training despite being aged 34 (N9016). She first worked as a typist in the car industry, and learnt as she 'went along', and then moved to as a clerk to an insurance firm:

> Well they gave me a manual to work the computer. I just learned myself. But I managed.... I had a manual to work it all out. And I wasn't computer-minded so I was right in at the deep end.

She moved to become a branch administrator for a national sports company, a move which involved added responsibility, such as installing a new networked computer system, with no training and immediate effect.

> And, um, I had to teach the branch members how to use the computer and also my manager because he didn't really take an interest at all.

She says this job is a 'dead-end' and hopes to apply for a post in the wages department in a new Panasonic factory in Port Talbot.

One woman took a job after leaving university as an analytical chemist (B448):

> [B448] With Spillers, the flour millers....

[Interviewer] So did you need any kind of extra training when you took this job?
[B448] No.
[Interviewer] So you just walked in one day and....?
[B448] And started. Yes. Well the thing is.... I was responsible for the, but it was very uninteresting, very superfluous, you know it didn't warrant someone with a degree.

Even where vocational training is apparently available, it can be in name only. A young woman (N195) made this complaint of her Youth Training, and it is clear from her later description of a 'marvellous' training courses that she is able to be discriminating in her criticisms:

It was a complete waste of time. They didn't teach you to do anything. You had to learn it for yourself. They didn't show you what to do. It was a case of 'here's the stuff. Have a go'.... There's supervisors walking around and foremen but all they were there for was drinking coffee and having a fag. They were a complete waste of time. [My mates] all thought the same.

Sometimes people take a job with a promise of training which is not kept. One woman started at a florist's shop (B402):

She was going to and she promised me faithfully and they promised me this, that and the other, and when it eventually materialised like I said 'what about me signing on at the Tech'? She said 'oh sorry, no, we can't afford to let you have the time off'. I was working 8:30 am to 5:30 pm six days a week.

In other cases, training was available for some, but not others. A woman from Bridgend (B321) describes the pattern when working in her local hospital:

No. You had a funny situation there. If you went in as a clerk with 5 O levels then you could do further training, but if you were a shorthand typist [like her], you tended to stay.

A 30 year-old woman who started her career as a postgraduate student at Oxford University (B9986) received no research training in return for her fees. She was also given responsibility for undergraduate teaching with no supervision and no training:

I suppose I recognised what I thought was good in tutorials and one in particular I thought had been very successful in the way that he taught, and I tried to put together what I thought was good and rule out what was bad. All of us who were graduates spent ages sitting around talking about what constitutes good teaching and good tutorial.

On gaining a lectureship at Swansea University, she received only health and safety training in the form of fire drills. An 'induction day' was available, but:

My colleagues made a big fuss - 'Why do you want to go on an induction day, it's completely useless' - and actually made it quite hard for me to go.

Eventually she was given training in how to lecture, but she had two complaints about this. Firstly it was too late as she had already been teaching for six years. If the training was of any value, then it would have helped six previous cohorts her students. Secondly, the training was aimed at those who were completely new to teaching, but was taken by experienced tutors as a precondition of getting a permanent job. It was the archetypal 'unnecessary learning'.

Several respondents would agree with the woman who was asked about health and safety training:

No. Nobody worried about things like that then. It's quite a new thing I think, isn't it?

But since several accounts tell of injuries, especially losing fingers in machinery (B420, G768, and N195 for example), the growth, described above, of such training may be more necessary than the formalisation of other types. One woman who was moved to work on the police switchboard was given no training - 'nothing at all' - but the switchboard was so old that 'it would give you electric shocks and cut out'. However, even in companies with excellent health and safety

Their simple answer is to leave society as it is, and to encourage learning chiefly through publicly or individually financed episodes of certified formal learning.

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Appendix - Training and insecure employment

It has been suggested elsewhere (e.g. Gorard et al. 1997a) that part of the motivation for an increase in lifelong learning springs from the increasing insecurity of employment in the UK. The argument is that as work becomes more contingent, individuals will need retraining more frequently, and that therefore trainability is a key skill in itself. For the purposes of this analysis, contingent work is defined as self-employment, and full or part-time employment lasting less than a year, for individuals aged over 21 at the time (to minimise short spells during the transition to the labour market), and ignoring any current spells. The results for each decade are presented in Table IV. The study found that the 1,104 respondents experienced a total of 3,249 work episodes (jobs). Of these 348 lasted less than a year, only 246 of which involved adults aged over 21, and these 246 episodes only involved 194 individuals. Only 138 episodes (and 106 individuals) were followed by anything other than a length spell of employment. Therefore contingent work is apparently not very common, nor a permanent repeating status for many people. There is no indication here that contingent work is increasing progressively in South Wales. The peak was actually in the 1960s, and this is true for all age cohorts in the study. Although more common among women throughout the period (and among skilled non-manual occupations such as sales and secretarial work), there is no evidence of an increase over time for either gender.

Table IV - Contingent work by decade

Decade	Percentage of episodes
1940s	1
1950s	7
1960s	12
1970s	10
1980s	10
1990s	0

Only 13% of the contingent episodes involved any training at all, compared to 34% of other employment, but the probability of training spell in any contingent episodes is actually higher when the length of employment is taken into account.

The contingent workers are divided fairly evenly between the learning trajectories, except that delayed learners are more likely to experience insecure employment than non-participants. Of the 11 original trajectories, those least likely to be contingent workers are false-start trainees and work-based learners (Gorard et al. 1997d). Thus, those who leave school at the earliest opportunity and move to a job with training are most likely to have secure employment throughout their life. Security of employment is unrelated to initial and lifetime qualifications. On the basis of the figures presented here, it is unlikely that increasing insecurity of employment is related to any progress towards a learning society in South Wales.